

Strengthening International Ties

Story and Photos by SGT Daniel Monroy

At Fort Benning, Ga., Spanish-speaking U.S. and foreign officers are learning the fine points of humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.



Dr. Steven Rozman of Tougaloo College and Venezuelan Capt. Moriana Carolina Vargas, WHINSEC guest instructor, discuss poverty in Latin America during a WHINSEC-sponsored conference.

WHILE leaders focus on transforming the Army into a more lethal, mobile force to respond to ever-increasing contingencies around the world, Army instructors at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, a tenant at Fort Benning, Ga., are teaching their students the fine points of humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.

“Transitioning from a conventional-conflict mindset to that of operations other than war is an important focus of the curriculum at the institute,” said student MAJ Eric Rodriguez, an Army Reserve medical operations and intelligence officer.

Like most field-grade officers, Rodriguez, who’s attending WHINSEC’s Command and General Staff Officer Course, is learning to head large-scale noncombat operations. An important part of that involves learning how to teach soldiers to alter their thinking from that of a combat soldier to a humanitarian, he said.

The 49-week course, the longest course of some 20 offered at the institute, is geared toward battalion and

brigade commanders, to teach them how to work effectively with nongovernmental organizations that often participate in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. These include such organizations as the American Red Cross, Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders, Rodriguez said.

The curriculum incorporates lessons learned from past military operations and classes in U.S. operations-other-than-war doctrine, as well as the unique considerations of conducting business in Latin American

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SGT Daniel Monroy is assigned to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation.

Civilian, military and police members of a resource-management class work together during a practical exercise involving the formulation of a defense budget.



countries, said MAJ Maricela Alvarado, a recent CGSOC graduate.

WHINSEC's CGSOC is equivalent to the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College course at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., and is accredited by the Department of the Army. Unlike other CGSCs, however, it's conducted entirely in Spanish, making it a much sought-after course by international students, said COL Richard Downie, the institute's commandant.

Other of WHINSEC's courses — all of which “cover most areas of joint and interagency operations relevant to a particular region” — range from the Democratic Sustainment Course to the Counterdrug Operations Course, Downie said.

As is true of other Defense Department-run international schools, WHINSEC's curriculum is developed in keeping with international laws and principles set forth in the Charter of the Organization of American states, an organization similar to the United Nations, said Downie.

A focus on human rights is a critical aspect of that charter, he said. Every course taught at WHINSEC therefore contains a common thread: human rights discussions and training. Depending on the length of a particular course, each student receives from eight to 40 hours of training in subjects that include: Ethics, Due Process, Rule of Law, Civilian Control of the Military, Role of the Military in a Democratic Society, Law of Land Warfare, the Geneva and Hague Conventions, and International Humanitarian Law.

The human-rights program was developed to create respect for human rights among members of the armed

forces, law enforcement, and government and nongovernment agencies, in all aspects of operations, said MAJ Antonio Raimondo, chief of WHINSEC's International Law Division, and the institute's judge advocate general.

“Working at the institute has been a wonderful experience. It's allowed me to learn so much from so many people,” said Capt. Moriana Carolina Vargas, an attorney in the Venezuelan army, and a guest instructor of human rights at the institute.

She's one of several foreign officers and police serving as cadre at the school.

With its focus on joint operations and security in the Western Hemisphere, coupled with an emphasis on human rights, WHINSEC is dedicated to strengthening ties between the United States and other nations, predominantly those of Central and South America and their neighbors. □



Other students listen as a Colombian army officer briefs them on the progress of a simulated humanitarian-relief operation.



During a role-playing exercise, U.S. Army CGSOC student MAJ Maricela Alvarado illustrates the movement of “enemy” armor for fellow students.